GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2814
ANSWERED ON:02.08.2017
Fishermen in Various Jails
Solanki Dr. Kirit Premjibhai;Vellaigounder Shri Elumalai

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of fishermen imprisoned in jails of Sri Lanka and Pakistan;

(b) whether the Government is pursuing their release along with the boats;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) The number of Indian fishermen in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities as on 31 July 2017 is 15. As per the available information, there are 417 fishermen believed to be Indian in Pakistani jails as on 31 July 2017.

(b) & (c) Government regularly takes up with the Governments of Sri Lanka and Pakistan the matter of early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen and fishing boats. Our High Commissions in Colombo and Islamabad provide humanitarian and legal assistance to the apprehended fishermen. India has consistently maintained that the fishermen issues involve longstanding livelihood and socio-economic practices and humanitarian concerns that need to be handled with great care and sensitivity.

With Sri Lanka, the fishermen issues have been taken up at the highest level, including by the Prime Minister with the Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister during his visit to Sri Lanka in May 2017. External Affairs Minister also raised the matter with the visiting Sri Lankan Prime Minister in April 2017 and subsequently with the Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs during the latter's visit to India in June 2017. As a result of sustained diplomatic efforts, Government has so far secured the release of 251 fishermen in Sri Lankan custody in 2017.

Following our 2+2 initiative in November 2016 when the Foreign and Fisheries Ministers of the two countries met in New Delhi, a bilateral Joint Working Group (JWG) mechanism was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues. It was also agreed that Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries meet every six months to review the progress. So far two rounds of the JWG meeting have been held. The 2nd meeting of the JWG held on 7 April 2017 in Colombo took stock of the implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) agreed to by both sides pending a permanent solution to the fishermen issues.

(d) Does not arise.